



Discussing European Qualifications Systems

An account of the NQF-in Project Seminar on including qualifications attained through non-formal education in the qualifications systems of selected European countries

A seminar entitled *The development of qualifications systems – including qualifications awarded outside formal education systems in qualification systems, based on the examples of 7 European countries* was held on April 18, 2018, at the Educational Research Institute (IBE) in Warsaw, Poland.

The seminar was organised as part of the NQF-in Project *Developing organisational and financial models for including non-formal sector qualifications in National Qualifications Frameworks*, whose leader is the Educational Research Institute. The project has been implemented under the Erasmus+ Programme since September 2015 in partnership with leading institutions in the field of qualifications in six countries: Croatia, the Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Ireland, and the United Kingdom/Scotland.

The seminar was held to provide the most up-to-date information on the development of qualifications systems in the countries participating in the project and against this backdrop, the current situation in Poland. The seminar was attended by about 40 persons, including employees of the Educational Research Institute, representatives of ministries (Ministry of National Education, Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and other institutions, as well as representatives of important stakeholders in the area of qualifications (Central Examination Board, Centre for Education Development, Polish Information Processing Society, Warsaw Institute of Banking, Pearson).

Dr. Piotr Stankiewicz, Director of IBE, officially opened the seminar. He emphasised the importance of the NQF-in Project as an undertaking that combines research and analytical work to result in practical implementation activities. The Institute conducts both types of activities in the field of qualifications systems, thus supporting the implementation of reliable policies based on research results.

Sylwia Walicka, NQF-in Project Manager, then presented the aims and activities of the project. Afterwards, Dr. Stanisław Sławiński, a project expert, discussed key concepts relating to the inclusion of various types of qualifications in national qualifications systems. He paid special attention to the need to ensure terminological consistency, which allows mutual understanding to be attained, and enables all activities (both design and systemic) to be compared at national and international levels.

The next part of the programme was the presentation of information on the process adopted by various European countries, as represented by the project's partners, to include (or not) qualifications awarded outside the formal education system into national qualifications systems. The presentations were based, among others, on the [country reports](#) prepared by individual project partners.

An introduction on the given qualifications system and types of qualifications functioning in a given country was provided in each presentation. However, the aim of the presenters (NQF-in Project experts representing IBE) was to show how non-formal education qualifications are included in a given national system – including procedures, the role of key institutions and costs of this process.

The experts started with three countries having the longest tradition in the field of qualifications systems and frameworks in Europe (their qualifications frameworks were implemented before the

passage of the European Parliament and Council Recommendation of 2008 on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning). Sylwia Walicka presented the French system, Agata Poczmańska the Irish system, and the Scottish system was presented by Barbara Przybylska.

After this, "younger" systems were presented, that is, those in which qualifications frameworks were implemented after the adoption of the EQF Recommendation. Horacy Dębowski described the qualifications system of Croatia, Agata Poczmańska presented the Czech system, and Sylwia Walicka the Hungarian system. Each of the presentations ended with a plenary discussion resulting from the numerous questions and comments of the participants.

Against this background, Lech Boguta from the Ministry of National Education (Department of Strategy, Qualifications and Vocational Education) discussed the genesis and course of establishing the Integrated Qualifications System (IQS) in Poland. He also presented the current status of IQS implementation and the challenges we are facing.

The next part of the seminar was a panel discussion moderated by Horacy Dębowski, the person who conceptualised the NQF-in Project. The panel members are stakeholders who had also participated in the international NQF- in conference held on November 9, 2017 in Prague. They were:

- Lech Boguta from the Ministry of National Education (Department of Strategy, Qualifications and Vocational Education),
- Dr. Jacek Pulwarski, ECDL National Coordinator (Polish Information Processing Society),
- Mariola Szymańska-Koszczyk, Vice-President, Warsaw Institute of Banking.

Each panellist has been involved in the work of establishing the IQS for many years and in designing and testing the solutions relating to, among others, the inclusion of qualifications into the system. During the panel discussion, the challenges arising from the review of national solutions were discussed.

The first question posed to the panellists concerned their impressions of the information presented at the Prague conference and their conclusions based on this. They responded by stating that the topic of the "ownership" of qualifications after their inclusion in a system was of particular interest. In Poland, such a qualification becomes a "public good", so the content of the qualification description is publicly available, and other entities (not only the entity that submitted the qualification for inclusion in the system) can apply for the authorisation to award it. Mariola Szymańska-Koszczyk expressed her satisfaction that in other European countries, it is a common practice for entities submitting qualifications for inclusion to retain ownership of it – in her opinion, changing this approach in the Polish system could make the IQS significantly more attractive to stakeholders, such as private domestic companies or large corporations and international organisations.

Horacy Dębowski then raised the subject of international qualifications (which are qualifications attained through non-formal education) and the possible ways of including them into national systems, as well as the potential benefits they provide. The question was addressed in particular to Jacek Pulwarski and Mariola Szymańska-Koszczyk, because they both represent institutions that award qualifications available internationally. An example is ECDL Base, which could not be included in the IQS because it is part of an independent, international certification system that cannot be changed to meet the requirements of prevailing legal regulations on inclusion (the Act of 22 December 2015 on the Integrated Qualifications System). Therefore, the Polish Information Processing Society (which confers ECDL qualifications), after consulting with the ECDL central office (European Computer Driving License), submitted a market qualification similar to ECDL Base to the IQS for inclusion, i.e. "Certificate

of computer skills – basic level". The process of including this qualification in the IQS will soon be completed, but entities such as PTI would like international qualifications to be included in the IQS as well. As a result of this discussion, Dr. Sławiński pointed out that perhaps this can be accomplished by considering an alternative solution, such as having such a qualification "accredited" by the minister responsible for the given field. However, this would mean developing a new separate procedure for the inclusion of international qualifications in the system.

The next topic addressed by the invited experts concerned quality assurance. Mariola Szymańska-Koszczyk believes that these rules could be less stringent, and that there should be greater mutual trust between the various entities functioning in the IQS (first of all between decision-makers and market entities submitting qualifications or applying for the authorisation to award them). In her opinion, this would increase the effectiveness of the system, although she realises that the quality assurance regulations are aimed at supporting the comparability of qualifications and the processes for the validation of learning outcomes – both in the domestic and international perspective.

Any discussion about the functioning of qualifications systems invariably touches on the issue of financing these systems – and this also emerged here. Horacy Dębowski asked the panellists for their opinion on the level of the fees charged in Poland (for including qualifications and applying for the authority to award qualifications). The panellists agreed that the fees are neither too high nor too low. Lech Boguta from the Ministry of National Education informed those present that the Minister Coordinator (of the IQS) has not received any information indicating that these fees are too high or have prevented someone from submitting an application. Panellists also stated that the level of the fees serve as a type of barrier needed against cursory applications and protects against the excessive fragmentation of the system.

In concluding the seminar, Sylwia Walicka presented the further steps planned in the NQF-in Project. She particularly emphasised the upcoming publication of the models on including qualifications awarded outside formal education into national qualifications systems. She noted that the key conclusions of the publication and the results of the entire project will be presented at a conference, which will be held on June 5-6, 2018 in Warsaw ([registration is now open](#)).

Our thanks go to the participants of our seminar for their active involvement and we invite everyone to the concluding conference of the NQF-in Project.

The NQF-in Team

Downloads:

1. [Seminar programme](#)

Seminar presentations:

2. [Introduction to the seminar and information about the NQF-in Project](#) (Sylwia Walicka)
3. [Including different types of qualifications in the NQF – conceptual and terminology issues](#) (Dr. Stanisław Sławiński, Horacy Dębowski)

Presentations on the national qualifications systems of particular countries:

4. [France](#) (Sylwia Walicka)
5. [Ireland](#) (Agata Poczmańska)
6. [Scotland](#) (Barbara Przybylska)

7. *Croatia (Horacy Dębowski) and the attachment to the presentation*
8. *Czech Republic (Agata Poczmańska)*
9. *Hungary (Sylvia Walicka)*

10. *Presentation of the Ministry of National Education on the Integrated Qualifications System (Lech Boguta, MEN)*

Project website: www.nqf-in.eu

You are invited to an international conference summarising the NQF-in Project

on 5-6 June 2018

at the Hotel Novotel Warszawa Airport (ul. 1 Sierpnia 1)

Conference details, link to the registration site and the conference programme are at:

<http://www.nqf-in.eu/index.php/news-and-events/49-invitation-to-the-nqf-in-project-conference-poland>

About the NQF-in Project

The Educational Research Institute is leading a project entitled “Developing organisational and financial models for including non-formal sector qualifications in National Qualifications Frameworks” (NQF-in Project) co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme (Action 2: Strategic Partnerships for vocational education and training) of the European Commission.

Project partners include institutions from:

- France (Centre for Research on Qualifications, Céreq),
- Ireland (Dublin Institute of Technology),
- Hungary (Educational Authority),
- Croatia (University of Split),
- Czech Republic (National Institute for Education),
- United Kingdom (Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership).

Additionally, consultancy and advice on project implementation is being provided by supporting partners from Germany (Federal Institute of Vocational Education and Training, BIBB), the Netherlands (Dutch National Agency NCP NLQF) and Luxembourg (Ministry of Education).

The main aim of the NQF-in Project is to support decision-makers in European countries as well as European institutions (European Commission, Cedefop, European Training Foundation) in determining policies on the inclusion of qualifications awarded outside the formal general, VET and higher education systems in national qualifications frameworks (qualifications systems).

Project aims will be achieved by analysing the systemic solutions operating in seven EU countries and developing organisational and financial models of including qualifications awarded outside the formal general, VET and higher education systems in national qualifications frameworks.

The project is being implemented from September 2015 to August 2018.